The Implied Author and Reader of *Couronnes d'amour*[1]

Introduction

In the last period of his life, Léon Dehon constructed a spiritual path whose contours have thus far been insufficiently brought to light[2]. This period of Dehon's life coincided with his forced departure from Saint Quentin and his exile to Brussels. His spiritual life underwent a change of direction away from his engagement with the social scene and became almost exclusively dedicated to a revisioning of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. During this time, he wrote nine books on the Sacred Heart and on spiritual life: *La retraite du Sacré-Cœur* (1896); *Le mois du Sacré-Cœur* (1899); *De la vie d'amour envers le Sacré-Cœur* (1900); *Couronnes d'amour* (1904); *Le Cœur sacerdotal de Jésus* (1906); *L'Année avec le Sacré-Cœur* (1918); *La Vie intérieure* (1918); *La vie intérieure : Ses principes, ses voies diverses et sa pratique* (1918) and *Études sur le sacré-Coeur de Jésus*(1922). Our analysis will focus on these texts.

In our study of these texts on the Sacred Heart, we will not advert to the biographical reality of Dehon during this period but limit ourselves to Dehon as the "implied author", that is, to the constructed authorial voice and to the "mock (implied) reader" as they emerge in these texts [3]. No attempt will be made to delineate the history of the effects of Dehon's earlier devotion to the Sacred Heart at the time of the founding of the Congregation. Nor will we attempt a full hermeneutic understanding of all the above texts on the Sacred Heart. Instead, we will use *Couronnes d'amour* as a lens to study what Wayne C. Booth has referred to as the persona, sensibility, or worldview that a reader infers about the author from the text itself, as distinct from the actual, biographical author. The implied author and reader are organizing principles,

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[1] *Dehondocs:* htpps://www.dehondocsoriginal.org Œuvres spirituelles.

[2] It must be noted that this lacuna has of late begun to change. See Joseph Famerée, "Christologie et anthropologie des '*Couronnes d'amour'* du P. Dehon", *Dehoniana 18* (25, 2020) pp. 39 – 49 ; Stefan Tertünte, " La réception des *Couronnes d'amour* (CAM) dans les publications de différents auteurs", *Dehoniana 17,* (24 2020) pp. 5 – 33 ; Van Hai Ngo, *Léon Dehon : Spiritualité du Cœur du Christ et engagement sociétal* (Clairefontaine : Éditions SCJ, 2021).

[3] Built into every text is the desire to have an effect on a reader. An author wants to influence the lives of people. That desire is inscribed in the text. This internal reader is constructed as part of the internal rhetoric of the text. That is why texts can be so convincing. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Buyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974).

creative refigurations within the text that propose a transformation of the everyday view of life.[4] In the case of the spiritual texts of Dehon, we will ask, using *Couronnes d'amour*, what internal structures have shaped the meaning of the Sacred Heart in the text.

All these texts on the Sacred Heart have a common internal structure. They share certain traits and our recognition of these traits may help us to understand the authorial intent of the text.

1. The six texts have received their form and identity as Sacred Heart texts by appropriating structurally certain devotional practices of the traditional Sacred Heart devotion, such as the Litany of the Sacred Heart, the Corona, the month of June, the notion of oblation, the liturgical year. It makes them to be "Sacred Heart" texts.
2. The six texts on the Sacred Heart have been given the form of the spiritual exercise known as a retreat. Each of the retreats is configured as a series of meditations.[5]
3. As meditations these texts are not analytical but practical, contemplative texts. They seek to achieve an impact in the mock reader, who is constructed as the maker of the retreat.
4. The mock reader is a meditant, a contemplative.
5. The ultimate goal of these meditations is union with the Sacred Heart of Christ attained by the meditant's passing through the mysteries of Christ, using a particular reading of the Scriptures, in this case of the New Testament, and of the liturgy of the Eucharist. The model for this reading or meditating the scriptures is derived from Piere de Bérulle from the French School of Spirituality.
6. The endpoint of these retreats, union with the Sacred Heart, is what the text calls pure love, a kind of mystical immersion of the meditant into the Sacred Heart.

[4] See Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 34-38. Similarly, Stanley Fish speaks of "interpretative communities" created by readers sharing conventions, expectations and cultural assumptions, leading to shared interpretations. See his *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 13-17. Similarly, Hans Robert Jauss (*Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* Tr. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) speaks of "horizons of expectations", the assumptions that readers bring to a text but are inscribed in the text. Thus, a text like *Couronnes d'amour* carries within the text the expectations and understandings of the Sacred Heart by an implied author and reader.

[5] In all, the six retreats on the Sacred Heart contain 625 meditations.

The organizing form and identity of the spiritual texts: the devotional practice.

For the reader as a member of the "interpretative community" there is an organizing structure of these retreats, allowing him or her to identify the text as being about the devotion to the Sacred Heart. They present themselves as a new configuration of the traditional devotion. The organizing principle consists of devotional acts of the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart which the text then refigures. The first, *La retraite du Sacré-Cœur* (1896), was in response to a challenge by a Jesuit retreat master to create a retreat of the Sacred Heart (RSC 1). The Jesuit was looking for a spiritual exercise akin to the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.* The first retreat, *La retraite du Sacré-Coeur,* uses the main themes of the Sacred Heart devotion, its trinitarian structure and the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The intent of the retreat, according to the author, is "to lead souls to the threshold of the Sacred Heart" (RSC 2), letting "the Lord speak directly" (RSC 3), using the scriptures.

In the subsequent Sacred Heart retreats, the implied author becomes more explicit. For the retreat *Le mois du Sacré*-Coeur he used the invocations of the litany of the Sacred Heart. For the retreat *De la vie d'amour envers le Sacré-Cœur,* he lets himself be guided by the celebration of the Sacred Heart during the month of June. For *Couronnes d'amour,* he took as his lead the *Corona* prayer, prayed daily by the community, built around its three mysteries of Christ: the Incarnation, the Passion and the Eucharist.[6] For Le *Cœur sacerdotal de Jésus* he used the sacrificial traditions of the devotion, particularly the notion of oblation. And finally, for his *L'Année avec le Sacré-Cœur,* he used the liturgical year. While guided by the practices of the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart, the author clearly intended to refigure the devotion. This refiguration of the devotion in these retreats will be the object of our study.

The practical outlook of the texts: the Sacred Heart as performance

[6] See the "*Triplex Corona SS. Cordis Jesu"* in *Thesaurus Precum,* (Bologna, Centro editorial Dehoniano 1954), p. 74 – 78.

What is most striking about these retreats is their practical outlook. They are intended to strengthen the interior life of the retreatants. The 'mock reader' of these texts – the retreatants – are most likely the members of the Congregation, but could as well be any reader. If the retreats give any theoretical or doctrinal message, that is incidental to their practical intent[7]. The retreats are to lead the retreatants to "the threshold of the Sacred Heart" (RSC 2). In this paper, we will explore this way through the retreat *Couronnes d'amour*, first published in 1904. *Couronnes* is the clearest example of the intent of the author. It is loosely based on the triple corona prayer found in the *Thesaurus precum*[8], the original prayer book of the Congregation. The retreat *Couronnes d'amour* has taken the five mysteries of its three crowns and explored each of the five mysteries of Christ through six meditations. Each crown consists of thirty meditations. The complete *Couronnes d'amour* consists of ninety meditations. The implied author suggests that the meditations be held consecutively, or during Christmas, March, and June, or over a three-year period during the month of June (CAM 1/8). The intent is clearly practical.

If *Couronnes d'amour* is primarily a retreat configured by a specific sequence of meditations, what Is the implied author constructing and how does the retreat accomplish its task? Right from the beginning, in the introductory meditation, we are told that this is "a new way" (CAM 1/13) and what this new way seeks to give is the gift of his Heart (CAM 1/15). To attain this gift, we are told, the retreatant must make this retreat entirely "in the Sacred Heart, with the Sacred Heart, and by the Sacred Heart" (CAM 1/13). The *Couronnes d'amour* proposes to make this gift of his Heart through a sequence of meditations, a contemplation of Christ's love in the mysteries of his life. As a generative literary device, these meditations seek to configure a "new way" to allow the

[7] Although Dehon wanted to undertake a kind of summa on the Sacred Heart and began to write an *Études sur le Sacré Cœur de Jésus – I and 2* (1922), he got no further than a preparation for such a study.

[8] The original *corona* prayer consisted of three crowns, each subdivided into five mysteries. *Thesaurus Precum,* Romae: apud curiam generalem, 1954) p. 74- 78. In the three crowns of *Couronnes d'amour* each of the five mysteries of the prayer are subdivided into six meditations. It means that *Couronnes d'amour* consists of 90 meditations. It must be noted that the titles of the five mysteries of *Couronnes d'amour* are not always the same as in the *Corona* prayer.

meditant a contemplative entry into the love of the Sacred Heart. The goal of the retreat is entry of the retreatant guided by the implied reader into the world of the Sacred Heart.

The primary feature of *Couronnes d'amour* is clearly its genre. *Couronnes d'amour* is constructed as a retreat through a sequence of meditations.[9] The practical goal of the retreat is to let the "soul" of the meditant enter the space or figure of pure love which is the Sacred Heart. Such a refiguration of self-love – Dehon's definition of the natural state of the soul – to reach pure love demands time. That is why the ninety meditations of *Couronnes d'amour* are "a series of meditations or readings in the form of a retreat on the mysteries of the Sacred Heart" (CAM 1/2).[10] This contemplative entry into the love of the Sacred Heart is a "deliberately choreographed spiritual experience"[11]. It is a methodical spiritual itinerary. The genre of a retreat through meditation is central to Dehon's configuration of the love of the Sacred Heart and delineates the retreatant's entry into the Heart of Christ.

The following of the three parts of *Couronnes d'amour* as a retreat does not require a director. It is an exercise by a retreatant. The main actor is the meditant. The only guide is provided by a particular style of meditation. Unlike Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, the aim of *Couronnes d'amour* is not to arrive at a decision but at an experience of union with Christ, that is, at an experience of pure love or the Sacred Heart in the self. The retreat consists of three cycles of thirty meditations, three crowns of love of the Sacred Heart: thirty meditations on the Sacred Heart in his Incarnation, thirty meditations on the Sacred Heart in his passion and thirty meditations on the Sacred Heart in the Eucharist. The contemplation is intended to guide the meditant to a point where he or she is overtaken by the experience of pure love. These meditations seek to refigure the retreatant by leading him or her to the point where he or she is overtaken by the figure of the Sacred Heart in the soul. The Sacred Heart is not an objective reality standing outside of the configuring element

[9] All his writings on the love of the Sacred Heart, outside of *La vie intérieure* and *Études sur le sacré Coeur de Jésus,* are configured as a retreat by the genre of meditation.

[10] Dehon may well have been influenced by Ignatius of Loyola and his Spiritual Exercises. See Terrence O'Reilly, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola: Contexts, Sources, Reception*, Jesuit Studies, vol. 31, (Leiden: Bril, 2020) p. 169.

[11] Joseph Famerée, "Christologie et anthropologie des '*Couronnes d'amour*' du P. Dehon" *Dehoniana 18,* 25 (2020), p.39-49. (please check !)

of the meditation, but it is what is being configured in the lives of the retreatant by the inner dynamic of the cycle of meditations.

If Fr. Dehon had written only one series of meditations on the Sacred Heart, it might not have drawn much attention. But to realize that for Fr. Dehon all but the *Etudes* and *La vie intérieure* make use of the literary form of meditation raises the important question: why such a predominance of the literary genre of meditation? What kind of world does the implied author want to generate with his meditations? The genre of meditation does not configure a doctrinal world outlining the doctrine of the love of the Sacred Heart – doctrinal texts have their own form – nor does it seek to configure a world of human praxis (such as devotional practices) – the world of the Sacred Heart is not ethically determined. Meditation is a recognized genre for the creation of a possible spiritual world, a world in which it is possible to live out a spiritual vision or "style". It is an aesthetic form in which the author seeks to construct the spiritual world of the Sacred Heart in the self, transforming the one meditating.

The meditations adopt the Sulpician form of meditation. In its written form the Sulpician meditation consisted of three parts: (1) a declarative text about some divine reality, (2) an explanation of the declarative text giving a particular perspective of this divine reality, and (3) an application of this divine reality to the life of the one meditating. This is followed by a section called "Affections and resolution", indicating that what is being configured is in the affective sphere, touching the human emotions.[12] The meditation ends with a spiritual bouquet, consisting of scripture texts for the day. This form of meditation was current and popular. The author did not introduce any changes. The novelty of *Couronnes d'amour* does not lie in the style of meditation. It lies in what is being formed in the "soul" of the retreatant.

The divine reality proposed by the meditation is based on a reading of the Gospels and focuses each time on one action or mystery of the life of Jesus: *Step One* is usually a particular passage from scripture about an action or a word of Jesus. It places Jesus before my eyes, or adoration. The person meditating reads and re-reads the scriptural text, even aloud if possible, and tries to

[12] For example CAM 1/20.

soak up the Gospel story. He or she enters the text to see, to hear, to smell, to touch the story or the passage. Through imagination, the reader/meditant fills in the textual gaps in the Gospel account, using them as invitation points to putting the self in the account.[13] *Step Two* reflects on the meaning and interpretation of the scriptural text. Here the one meditating places Jesus in his or her heart, or communion. By leaving aspects open in the text, inviting the reader to fill in the gaps, the meditant feels the feelings, the sentiments, the attitudes of Jesus embarking on a personal interpretation of what lies behind and within his actions, letting Jesus enter the heart of the meditant, so that the heart is touched and moved with feelings in response. The reader enters the account by appropriating the feelings, sentiments and attitudes of Jesus through their own experiences, desires and aspirations, coauthoring the text. The meditation on the feelings and attitudes sets in motion the gradual refiguration of the self of the meditant into the self of Jesus. Thus, the mock reader becomes an active participant, filling in the text's gaps with personal devotion, engaging them spiritually. *Step Three* starts with a prayer in which the meditant asks to actively participate in the movement of the meditation. With a heart full of Jesus' feelings and the meditant's own feelings, he or she is led to "action and to generosity" (ASC 1/128). It turns the act into a ritual of following in the way or in the footsteps of Jesus[14], becoming united with Jesus' interior intentions, motivations, and emotions.

Union with Christ by passing through the mysteries of Christ: the role of Piere de Bérulle and the French School of Spirituality.

[13] Wolfgang Iser, "The reading process: a Phenomenological Approach," in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader,* ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) pp. 279 -299. In his meditations Dehon uses different textual modulations to encourage devotional posture and affective and spiritual engagement. He uses direct address – "Oh beloved reader" – rhetorical questions – "How generous this oblation of the Heart of Jesus was!" – invitations to action – "let us listen to his voice in the silence of recollection" – and emotional appeals – "Oh Jesus how loving you are!" – personal application – "With you, I want to separate myself from creatures in order to hear the divine voice better" – and personal encouragement – "He whom I love is so good, how can I doubt him! How could I not love it!" In this way the text creates an interactive, emotional and spiritually focussed way of reading. These strategies support the author's broader goal of shaping a reader who can actively engage with the devotional practice of the Sacred Heart.

[14] Yuka Amano, *Reading as Ritual: Desire for Textual Community in Works by Jeremias Gotthelf, Izumi Kyoka, Yanagita Kunio, and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, Department of Comparative Literature, 2014). See also Van Hai Ngo, *L'apport de Léon Dehon à la spiritualité du Cœur du Christ (PhD diss.,* Université de Lorraine, 2020).

Although the name of Pierre de Bérulle is not mentioned in *Couronnes d'amour,* this activity of meditatively passing through the mysteries of the life of Jesus to arrive at union with Christ is modelled on his Christology.[15] According to Bérulle, by contemplation the meditant is gradually refigured into Christ by making his or her own the mysteries of Jesus Christ. For Bérulle this process started with the contemplation of the origin of the Son in the Father and the incarnation, followed by the sequence of meditations on the hidden life, Jesus' ministry, his death and the Eucharist. Making one's own these mysteries, the meditant sets in motion a growing relation between a lover and a beloved. In *Couronnes d'amour* Dehon follows this Berullian method. The meditant enters into these three crowns, each crown divided, like a rosary, into five mysteries, and each mystery explored in six meditations.[16] Thus a three-month sequence of meditations is constructed. What is obviously at stake here is the length of time in which the meditant is engaged practically with the mysteries of Christ.[17] The meditations are not intended to give information; they intend to affectively redirect the spiritual life of the one meditating.

To understand the impact that Bérulle's Christology has on Dehon we will examine three aspects of his spirituality, each of which we find back in *Couronnes d'amour*: (a) the exemplarity of Jesus for human life; (b) the necessity of the annihilation of the self to make way for Christ; (c) the endpoint of the contemplation: the union with Christ.

(a) the exemplarity of Jesus for human life

In constructing the meditations on the mystery of Christ in *Couronnes d'amour* the author incorporates the unique anthropology of de Bérulle. A small digression into Berulle's anthropology may be helpful here. Bérulle had a unique understanding of Christ's human nature which the implied author seems to have accepted. Christ's human nature, Bérulle maintains, is substantially

[15] The main sources for Dehon to arrive at this style and configuration of meditation were Pierre Cardinal de Bérulle (1575–1629), Charles de Condren (1588 – 1641) and Jean-Jaques Olier (1608 – 1657). The French school of spirituality saw a revival in France particularly between 1830 – 1890, during Dehon's formative years. (VPR 193) For an in-depth treatment of the French School see Louis Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne* (Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne 3; Paris: Aubier, 1966). Dehon's more immediate inspiration is François Libermann (1802 – 1852) See NHV 5/6.

[16] The three crowns refer to the Incarnation, Redemption/passion and the Eucharist prayed on the rosary. As Dehon writes : "It is an act of love toward the Sacred Heart, repeated a great number of times and which can be accompanied by a brief meditation on the mysteries of the Sacred Heart". (CAM 1/1)

[17] During Christmas, March, and June, or over a three-year period during the month of June. (CAM 1/8)

united with the Word of God. Bérulle understands this to mean that the human nature of Jesus does not subsist in itself but exclusively in the person of the Word. In other words, Christ's human nature receives its identity from the Word. His personal identity is the person of the Word. The human in Jesus has no selfhood; he was personally the Word of God. For Bérulle this personal identity in the Word is the ideal of humanity. He maintained that just as in Jesus his humanity is subsumed by his divinity, so it should for all humans. Human salvation or perfection lies in the gradual assumption by the human self of the divine. It meant that the human self must be overcome by the divine. This Christology does not lead to the elevation of the human but to its denigration. To be most truly itself, the human self must be annihilated and make place for the divine. That is how French spirituality understood the divinization of the human. In French spirituality the incarnation was not celebrated as a glorification of the human, but as an affirmation of its nothingness and its need to be dissolved into the divine. This view of the human was so dominant in France that we should not be surprised to find this anthropology also in the writings of Léon Dehon

b) The annihilation of the self in Bérulle's anthropology

In *Couronnes d'amour* this unique interweaving of the Christological and the anthropological clearly plays a role. If in Jesus there is a *kenosis* of the human in favour of the divine, so it must be in all humans. Tradition says that in Jesus the uncreated has become created, the divine has become human. But when Thomas Aquinas says that *the Word of God subsisted in a human being,* he does not mean the same as Bérulle or Dehon. Aquinas insists that the divine Word exists in (subsists in) Jesus of Nazareth. The Word has truly become human. This has enormous consequences for Christian spirituality. While Thomas Aquinas reveals the glorification of the human because paradoxically it is of God – today we speak of a divine *kenosis* – , Bérulle and Dehon seem unable to retain this positive image of the human. Whereas Christology today speaks of a divine *kenosis* -- a divine self-humiliation –, Bérulle and Dehon see only a human *kenosis* or self-emptying: the usurping or emptying of the human by the divine. The grandeur of the human is not just hidden in the grandeur of God; it must be effaced in God. This effacement of the human self by its being assumed by the divine becomes the Bérullian goal of all human life. The state of

Jesus' effacement of the human in the divine ought to be the goal of every human existence. For Bérulle a humanity which no longer subsists in itself but in another is a humanity of humiliation, of self-emptying, of poverty. In this "state" Jesus' humanity is one of self-sacrifice, of oblation. Jesus is the host victim (Olier). His human personhood – today we say his "self" – was totally absorbed, annihilated, in the divine. Bérulle's emphasis is on the "loss" of the human, not on its gain or enrichment. In this state Jesus, according to Bérulle, becomes the model for all humans. That same self-annihilated human life of Jesus in favour of the divine must flow through us. This is also the language we find in Dehon. As he says in *Couronnes d'amour*: "Our Lord's humanity did not have its own subsistence and lived only by virtue of its union with person of the Word. How this reality made him feel the nothingness of his human nature!" (CAM 1/134)

c) T*he endpoint: union with Christ*

This effacement, this self-annihilation, of the human self is the end goal of spirituality. This is best exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is this self-humiliation, this *kenosis*, incarnate. Jesus is the human as God had in mind. In him is bridged the ineffable distance between the creature and God. That is why the meditations of *Couronnes d'amour* lead the meditant into the various states of Jesus' life in order to imitate him. In the meditations, Jesus is presented as the ultimate example of the divinization of the human through its being taken up in the personhood of the Son of God.

Hence, as Jesus turned to the Father, so must we. As he denied his self, his human self, so must we. How? Through contemplation and adoration. Union with Christ, the ultimate gift of the annihilation of the self, is the gift of contemplation and adoration. To become naked of self as Christ became naked and to be submissive to his excellence by contemplation is the true adoration of God. All we need to do is to enter the movement of that love, manifested in the mysteries of Christ.[18] Contemplation and adoration will allow us to experience the nothingness of the self and

[18] In a classical text on this topic in his *Œuvre de Pieté,* Bérulle states this beautifully: "We must consider the infinity which is communicated to these mysteries by the infinite Person who performs them in his human nature. We must weigh, as it were, the perpetuity of these mysteries. They took place under certain circumstances in the past, yet they continue and are present and perpetual in a new manner. They are over as regards their execution, but they are present as regards their power; and their power never passes away, nor will the love that brought them about ever pass away. Therefore, the spirit, the state, the power, and the merit of the mystery is forever present …

to appropriate the total self-gift, the oblation, of Christ to the Father. Jesus' humanity, in other words, is the unique mediator of our union with God. By appropriating the self-sacrificing love of Jesus' humanity, we are one with Jesus.

Accordingly, our human selves must be dissolved to the point where – to use a popular citation of Dehon – no longer I exist but Christ dwells or lives in me (Gal. 2.20). The human self is to be replaced by the Word, by the Son of God, and this is accomplished by going through all the mysteries of the life and death of Jesus so that the self gradually becomes one in life, spirit, and heart with Jesus. This is the life of victimhood with Christ, the life of immolation and oblation. The self must make way for Christ. Underlying all of this is a notion of creation where we are nothing because what we are is not of ourselves but totally from God.[19] This is the frequently cited "*néant*" – the "nothing" that we are -- of the French School of spirituality and of Léon Dehon.

Couronnes d'amour's transformation of Berulle's Christology into the mysticism of the Sacred Heart

In *Couronnes d'amour* this Christology of the French School is transposed into a spirituality of the Sacred Heart[20]. Through his meditations on the love of Christ in the mysteries of Christ's life, the implied author leads the meditant to the overcoming of self, pronounced as a pervasive self-love, into the pure love of the Sacred Heart. As the implied author says at the beginning of *Couronnes d'amour*: "This retreat … must tell us all about the love of God, all about the love of the Sacred Heart which goes all the way to immolation for us, it must sacrifice our hearts in the fire of love, it must enflame them with an inextinguishable fire of love and immolation in union with the Sacred Heart and for the Sacred Heart." (CAM 1/13) The three parts of *Couronnes d'amour* retake the trajectory of de Bérulle and translate them into the trajectory of pure love in the Sacred Heart.

Therefore, we must treat the things of Jesus and his mysteries, not as things that are past and dead, but as things that are living and present, even eternal, from which we too should reap fruit that is present and eternal." William Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School* (NY: Paulist, 1989) p. 111.

[19] R. Bellemare, *Le sens de la créateur dans la doctrine de Bérulle* (Bruges : Desclée, 1959).

[20] Dehon was not alone in making this translation of the Christology of the French School into a Christology of the Sacred Heart. One of the originators of the devotion to the Sacred Heart had done so already in the 17th century. Like Dehon John Eudes (1601-1680) had insisted on a trinitarian reading of the devotion: "To adore the heart of Jesus is to adore the heart of the Son and the Holy Spirit; a heart which is a furnace of love burning intensely for us." (Jean Eudes, *La vie et le royaume de Jésus dans les âmes chrétiennes*, 1648)

In *Couronnes d'amour* the Sacred Heart is presented as an icon of Christ's life of self-gift, his oblation, of the human in favour of the divine. It is an icon of the infinite, generative and creative love of God which became a physical presence on earth. The heart of Jesus is a figure of what we must become.[21] Since the heart became flesh, it became a figure of the capacity of human love to incarnate pure love. This heart is a guarantee of the capacity of the human to physically appropriate through contemplation the signal events of Christ's life. It is a love appropriated by meditation in the life of the believer.

The word "love", pure love, in *Couronnes d'amour,* is made one's own by meditating on and appropriating the mysteries of the Sacred Heart. The Sacred Heart is the "gift which God gives us of himself". (CAM 1/23) It is the desire of God's goodness to "spread out", to spill out beyond Self which becomes incarnate in my desire to connect with my origin (CAM 1/24). Its origin is to be found in the gift of the Father which is the Son and in the Son as the gift in return to the Father which is God's Spirit. Love is defined in other words as an "*être hors de lui-même*" (CAM 1/35): to be outside oneself: the power of the self to be in the other. The model here is clearly trinitarian: the exchange of love in God. Pure love is to enter fully into this relational reality of God through a letting-go of my self-love for pure love. In the language of *Couronnes d'amour,* this gift to be outside oneself is called oblation. Oblation is the eternal self-gift, the identity, of the Son: "The mystery of his oblation does not go away; the Heart of Jesus is above all a victim offered to God, it is eternally offered." (CAM 1/65) As the Son, Jesus *is* oblation. It becomes ours in meditation, contemplating the mysteries of the Sacred Heart.

Dehon's mysticism of the Heart

Dehon showed a clear interest in what since the 17th century became known as the interior life. He reflected on this in two books.[22] This great interest in the interior life and spiritual life reflected the shift to the self as subject in modernity. While the exterior world began to show signs of God's

[21] This is reflected beautifully in a text of *Notes Quotidiennes:* "The intellect meditates on the mysteries and the divine attributes. The greatness of God, his perfections, the goodness of the Redeemer, his promises, and the soul is borne at first to an interested love, then to an interested pure love, finally to pure love." (NQT 39/112)

[22] *Vie Intérieure : Exercices Spirituels* (1918) and *La vie intérieure. Ses principes ses voies diverses et sa pratique* (1918).

absence, the interior world expanded. It became a space without limits: "the internal is vast, not limited, open."[23] This space – often identified as the space of the soul, the symbolic space of interiority – became the new space of God as subject. The soul was the space where the person of interiority sought to live. Here one lived as living outside of oneself. This interior world had its own geography, its own differentiated spaces. At its summit is the space of mystical life. It is here where implied author of *Ciuronnes d'amour* located the interior life of pure love.[24] It is the interior life of the Sacred Heart in us.

We have already stated that the individual enters this interior world by way of contemplation or meditation. What then is this world of the Sacred Heart that overtakes the self? Here a little digression may be helpful, guided by the insightful *L'anatomie de l'âme* of Mino Bergamo and his analysis of the mystical life in Europe. Bergamo makes a clear distinction between the way the Rhineland and Flemish mystics, and in line with them the Spanish mystics, such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, represented mystical union, and the modern entry into this life. Bergamo discerned a clear shift of perspective at the beginning of the 17th century, especially with Francis de Sales.[25] The 17th century's mysticism is a more derivative type of mysticism, different from the mysticism of the Rhineland of the 14th century and the Spanish mysticism of the 16th century. [26] And it is here that we must locate Dehon's mysticism of the Sacred Heart.

According to the Rhineland mystics (Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, Gertrude, Hildegard, Suso) the divine union of mystical life is with a God beyond any act of the faculties of the soul, the

[23] Mino Bergamo, *L'anatomie de l'âme, De François de Sales à Fénelon,* (Grenoble : Jérôme Million, 1994) p. 10
[24] It is not coincidental that Dehon's more analytical reflection on pure love is found in his *La vie intérieure: ces principes, ces voies diverses et sa pratique* (1918) (VPR). Dehon had a great admiration for the austere spiritual writer Louis Lallemant and his *Doctrine Spirituelle* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2011 (original publication date 1694)).
[25] In Dehon's *Instruction aux Sœurs Servantes* (1913) where Dehon speaks of the Sacred Heart devotion as a mysticism he writes: "In our vocation to the Heart of Jesus, we have two great masters, two great doctors, who are St Ignatius and St Francis de Sales." (Dis9050144/2,3). He admits that there is a slightly nuanced difference between the two in that he considers Francis de Sales to be more gentle than Ignatius.
[26] Michel de Certeau held that the vogue for mysticism ended with the Rhineland and Spanish mystics prior to modernity and that subsequent mysticism can only interpreted as derivative or as a less creative form. See Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992). With de Bérulle and the French School Western mysticism made a clear shift differentiating it from the earlier phases but nonetheless a clear mystical path.

intellect and will. These mystics maintained that there is something higher and more noble in the soul than the powers of intellect and will. In the deepest essence, the being of the soul, they maintained, the Father engenders the Son. There, they said, "the divine is born …, and the human becomes itself divine."[27] This union of the human with the divine transforms the person into God or Christ. In other words, there is a point in the soul – its apex – where God takes over and engenders the Son in us.[28] For these mystics this indwelling is very real, ontological, one might say. In the depths of the soul, the person emerges as the space of the presence of God.

This vision of the mystical shifts radically in the 17th century, particularly through Francis de Sales. Here the highest part of the soul, the mystical place, does not exclude the faculties of intelligence and will, as it did in the Rhineland mystics. The new mysticism of Francis de Sales is to be found within the orbit of the rational faculties, although it must be admitted that these faculties at this point have become supra-discursive. Francis de Sales does not propose an ontological union with God but a psychological union, that is, a union through intellect and will at their highest level of agency.[29] This union is best approached through the practice of mental prayer: the acts and movements at the summit of contemplative life. Here we see a clear correspondence with Dehon's meditational form. In mental prayer the human interior acts of this silent prayer of meditation take us to the most noble region of the soul. There at their highest point they achieve the mystical union.

Francis de Sales identifies the operations of the soul as "passive actions." If the "lower region of the soul" consists of the engagement of the human intellect and the will, in the prayer of quietude or in the silent prayer of contemplation, the soul is carried beyond the capacities of the intellect and will, to a supra-discursive level. Through the faculties of the intellect and will, God draws the soul interiorly toward contemplation. In the silent prayer of meditation or contemplation the

[27] Bergamo, *L'anatomie,* p. 148.

[28] In the words of Tauler: "In this bottom of the soul … God is always very present and unceasingly engenders his Son. For, where the Father is, it is necessary that he engenders, and that He engenders his Son. What am I saying? He engenders us ourselves, so that through the grace of adoption, we become his adoptive children." See Bergamo, *L'anatomie,* p. 150

[29] Bergamo, *L'anatomie,* p.167

mystical place of the soul is not ontologically taken over by God, as in the Rhineland mystics, but the operations of the intellect, but especially of the will, are overtaken by the divine. It is not the space, the ontological space of God, but a psychological space prepared by the operations of the intellect and the will. This is the new form of mysticism that in the 17th century superseded the Rhineland mysticism. Its main practice is silent prayer, the prayer of quietude. In it the practitioner is awakened to the presence of God through a loving dialogue with God. In this divine contemplation one lets oneself be transformed by God.[30] This is the modern mysticism of the passive act of contemplation.

Using this imagery of the intellect and will, the implied author located the mysticism of the Sacred Heart in the summit region of the soul. Inspired by Francis de Sales' contemplation, the mysticism of *Couronnes d'amour* reaches out to the summit of the soul through retreats and daily meditations (CAM 1/11). In reading *Couronnes d'amour* carefully, it is easy to discern how its mystical path is paved by the contemplation of love. It is prepared by reason and leads to love: "it is love which accomplishes everything; love is prepared by knowledge; it leads to love. Everything is done through love: one loves while knowing, one loves while doing." (CAM 1/29) This is *Couronnes d'amour's* "new way" or "the way of the Sacred Heart" (CAM 1/11). In *Notes Quotidiennes* Dehon validates this experience:

> I look back at the meditations that I wrote for the threefold crowns. I complete them. It is a grace for me. I place myself in a situation of an ardent love for the Sacred Heart. It is for me the only path where I can walk more assuredly. The other directions may convince my spirit, but they do not grasp me as strongly. It is my way; it is the vocation. Jesus seeks from me a tender love or nothing. Love suffices me in every way; it helps me to be humble, to repent, to follow the counsels of perfection, to keep me united to our Lord. It is my salvation, and it is my sanctification. (NQT 19/67)

[30] Bergamo, *L'anatomie,* p. 177.

The meditations of *Couronnes d'amour* are intended to allow his followers to find "a permanent dwelling in this Heart" (CAM 1/10). They reach this dwelling – the mystery of love of the Sacred Heart – by passing through of all the mysteries of Christ's life and through union with Christ in the Eucharist. Here the mock reader is led to the presence of the Sacred Heart in the summit of the soul. There the Sacred Heart becomes for him or her the agent force of fire, a bursting forth of light, and a powerful embrace. The Sacred Heart is there as "a light and a new warmth" (CAM 1/11) which opens the soul to the agency or way of the Sacred Heart where "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2.20) It is where, according to implied author, the love of the Sacred Heart operates in the reader. There the human heart is wholly "in the Sacred Heart, with the Sacred Heart and through the Sacred Heart. It must reveal to us the full love of God, the full love of the Sacred Heart to the point of immolating itself for us; it must consume our hearts in the fire of love, inflaming them with an inextinguishable fire of love and immolation in union with the Sacred Heart and for the Sacred Heart" (CAM 1/13)

What author describes here has all the markings of the mystical way of modernity as outlined by Francis de Sales. The summit of the soul is named the heart, but here it is the heart in its depth. It is the space of that which exceeds us: the Heart of Jesus. "In this Heart we wish to dwell [during the retreat]. The Heart of Jesus is our home, our refuge, the place of our retreat" (CAM 1/16). This is what is called our "mystical union" which is "the final term of union with the Heart of Jesus" in which we are "like a blank canvass on which he will imprint the seal of his Heart" (CAM 1/19), making true for the meditant the words of Paul: "I live now not I but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2.20). The author freely translates this as "His Heart lives in me" (CAM 1/19).

Pure love must thus be seen from a mystical perspective, as a gift of the Sacred Heart that encompasses the reader. This becoming in us of the Sacred Heart is made even more explicit in the second *Couronnes*. There he writes:

> It is the Sacred Heart of Jesus who loves for us; he is both the organ of the love that God has for us and of the love that we have for God; he is everything for us and we are

everything in him: *Per ipsum, cum ipso et in ipso.* It is only through the Heart of Jesus that it is possible to establish between God and us this wonderful community of poor creatures with their Creator, with God, who becomes their Father and their friend." (CAM 2/224)

This gift is the active passivity in Dehon's spirituality which he calls pure love. In Dehon, pure love points to the upper reaches of our spirit as taken over by the love of the heart of Christ – the Sacred Heart. Dehon surmises in his meditations that it is not our reason and will that at their height become receptive of the divine, but our affections. It is the Heart of Jesus – "the insinuations of the Heart of Christ" (CAM 1/12) – which overflow in our hearts and spirit. "Our only business ought to be the consideration of the Heart of Jesus", says Dehon (CAM 1/15). At first sight this would make pure love a pure passivity in us. However, pure love is not totally passive, it is also active.[31] It is perhaps Rousselot who has best expressed pure love as passive/active by identifying it as an ecstatic reality. On the one hand, he says, pure love is beyond the human capacity to form a theory about it. To think pure love is beyond the reach of intellect and will. On the other hand, pure love is a partaking in the infinite energy of God's *agape*, the unsurpassable love of Christ, that encircles us and becomes an energy or a *dunameis* in us.

It is important to grasp the role of the Heart of Christ for the implied author. The Heart of Christ is what God had in mind in creation. "It (the Heart of Christ) was God's main aim: God prepared everything for the Heart who ought to give him so much love and who ought to love us so much." (CAM 1/30). In God the return of love of the Son to the Father is the Sacred Heart: it is "the thinking and loving heart of God" (CAM 1/30).[32] This "thinking and loving heart of God" became incarnate in Jesus. The Word, as the self-emptying of the Father, came among us in the love of Jesus, or the Sacred Heart. What was active within the Godhead between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit is now active in creation and in human life. Becoming one in Christ's Heart as the end-goal

[31] In a letter to Marie du Cœur de Jésus, Dehon writes: "what happiness to receive these oft-repeated words : pure love, reparation, interior life, union, immolation, victim life, abandonment, fidelity, recognition, hidden, silent, suffering life, etc."

[32] Or, as he states elsewhere: "The opening of the Heart of Jesus is the mystery of mysteries, the foundation of all the others, the mystery of love" (CAM 2/193).

of contemplation is to give birth to a human existence where this love of the trinitarian God is realized. The relation between the Father and the Son is revealed in Jesus' relationship with humans. To arrive at mystical union is to be so immersed in the person of Jesus Christ that we relate to other humans and to creation on the model of Christ. That is the goal of the sequence of meditations. As it is stated: "How does God enter into such an intimate association with us through love? It is through the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the mediator of this friendship. It is this divine Heart of God that loves in us because we belong to him, and through this Heart the Holy Spirit comes to us to help us utter those words by which we call God our Father, according to the familiar expression used by St. Paul: 'Abba Father.' After all, it is always the Sacred Heart of Jesus who loves in our stead"(CAM 2/224).[33]

This immersion in Jesus which is the result of contemplation also clarifies the agency of reparation. The text mentions reparation a few times in *Couronnes d'amour*[34] and these few times confirm the mystical approach. The primary act of reparation, it says, is the reparation that was accomplished when, in the birthing forth of the Son from the Father, the Sacred Heart "dwelt among us." God's love among us in the person of Jesus is the reparation of creation. In the words of *Couronnes d'amour:* "By the attentive contemplation of the mysteries of the Heart of Jesus, the divine fire will descend from heaven, that is, the Heart of Jesus and it will consume our hearts. Only persons hidden in the Sacred Heart can repair for they have a treasure which allows them to pay for themselves and for others. (CAM 1/127) Our dwelling in the Heart of Christ, or the Heart of Christ dwelling in us makes us partakers "of this great mission of reparation … transforming our

[33] It is more difficult to show how this disinterested love is present in the second volume of *Couronnes d'amour* which deals with the passion of Jesus. It is more difficult because the passion and death of Jesus plays itself out in the background of a redemptive love in the face of human sinfulness. Pure love must remain free from compulsion or free from a desire to "console". Dehon does not always succeed in avoiding feelings of obligation or guilt before the sufferings of Jesus. See, for instance, CAM 2/40 – 46: "The Chalice of Consolation."

[34] Except in the third crown where the fourth mystery is exclusively about reparation (CAM 3/ 165 – 218). There he speaks of three kinds of reparation (1) atoning for the faults of a person, (2) mortifications and external penances, (3) Eucharistic reparation which he says is the main type of reparation. Of Eucharistic reparation Dehon says that this reparation is truly made only by the "Eucharistic Heart of Jesus" who alone loves and gives thanks. The reparation of the members, he says, consists in "associating" with the Heart of Jesus and his work of reparation. Here "the water of our heart's dispositions" will be transformed by his love "into acts of generous love" (CAM 3/194).

acts of generous love, as the miraculous wine of Cana" (CAM 3/194). Reparation comes from love but "this love is lit by his Heart." (CAM 3 / 207)

Here the secret of God's love is revealed, the secret that inhabits all reality as God's gift. Pure love here is first of all the pure love of the Sacred Heart in which the human self is annihilated into the love mystery of the Heart of Christ. As the author says: "Your Heart opened so that it would allow us to enter" (CAM 2/198). Fr. Dehon says something similar in the *Spiritual Directory*: "The will must allow itself to be consumed like the grain of incense and disappear in the flames of the love of the Sacred Heart". The Heart is like the immensity of the sun or the abyss of the ocean that has entered the hearts of humans so that humans have the capacity to love (CAM 1/30). Love is the *elan,* the energy or enthusiasm, of the soul toward God (CAM 2/221). In *Couronne*'s terms, the highest mode of entry into the Heart of Jesus is "to immolate oneself directly to God and the Sacred Heart as expiating victims appeasing God's justice" (CAM 2/199).[35]

How this entry takes place is important. In contemplation, the implicit author proposes, the human intellect seeks to fulfill our deepest desires and aspirations, bringing us ever closer to God. In the contemplative entry into the mysteries of Christ, we are gradually brought to a point where what we have come to *know* is turned into *love.* We come to love what we seek. Here the divine and the human come together, cooperate together, in favour of what we know in faith. A communion takes place. How they come together does not lie fully in us but comes to us as a gift of the Holy Spirit. What we have come to know in faith is fulfilled in love. This is our entry into the Sacred Heart.

The way of the Sacred Heart reaches its apex in the Eucharist

[35] Along this line, it is possible to understand Dehon's notion of reparation as being the endpoint of the Sacred Heart in us. If the Sacred Heart is God's main aim in creation, then our being overtaken by the Sacred Heart is the highest form of reparation. Here what God had in mind in creation, the Sacred Heart, has entered into the human heart, restoring the original intent of God in creation.

This love and the union with the Sacred Heart reach their completion in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the third crown: its completion. In the Eucharist the union with Christ is enacted within us. It is where we encounter Christ's real presence for us – that is, his self-gift. The Eucharist is the final mystery of Christ.[36] The Eucharist is the summation of Christ's self-gift to us, where his coming forth from the Father is re-enacted ritually, opening for us the capacity to live in the intimacy of love (CAM 3/15). In giving himself in the Eucharist, Christ gives us himself in all aspects, his humanity, divinity, his wisdom, powers, and infinite goodness. "He wishes to be all for us so that we might be all for him" (CAM 3/17). The Heart of Jesus is very much alive in the Eucharist: "To continue always and without interruption the *ecce venio* and the act of love that the Incarnation was – such is the unique activity of the Sacred Heart. He thinks only of us, lives only for us, and has no other mission but to love us and to give himself for us." (CAM 3/80) Enacted here is the word of Paul: "I no longer live; it is Jesus who lives in me: life for me is Christ, the Heart of Jesus." (CAM 3/84)

In the Eucharist, the implied author sees the completion of the emptying of the self and the taking on of divinity, the heart of the Sacred Heart. Here the self is being replaced by the Heart of Christ. Here we have a "substitution which the Sacred Heart enacts in us" (CAM 3/123), even a type of "transubstantiation": "the changing to the wine of love the water of our imperfect dispositions" (CAM 3/123). Here, the Sacred Heart incorporates us in himself.[37] Accordingly, our love, our thanksgiving, reparation and adoration become an act of the Sacred Heart, offered to God in our name, "so that they do no longer come from us, who are nothing, but as coming from the [Sacred] Heart" (CAM 3/124). This is the priestly act of Jesus: our intentions and affections become those

[36] Like many others in his time, Dehon has little to say about the resurrection of Jesus. The mysteries of Jesus is completed in the Eucharist. Hence the importance of adoration for the spirituality of the Congregation.

[37] In his meditations on the Sacred Heart Dehon assigns a special mission to priests: "Our Lord… acts very much through the priest. … In the person of the priest, it is the priesthood of Jesus Christ that baptizes, absolves, consecrates, unites husbands and wives, blesses virgins." (CAM 3/162) Thus he speaks of "the mystical/ moral presence of [Christ's] priesthood in [his] priests" (CAM 3/164), of the Sacred Heart acting in priests in a special manner. In CAM 3/143-145 he even adds an appendix for priests who because of an accident of history in the Catholic Church in Dehon's time are the only ones to drink from the cup. He speaks there of the effect of wine on human spirit, giving joy and "spiritual inebriation" in the presence of the love of the Sacred Heart.

of the Sacred Heart, “of immolating ourselves with him, or living his life with his pure love.” (CAM 3/124)

Here the spiritual cycle is complete: “I will give them my flesh which is the life of the world; I will enliven them with my blood; in their heart I will place my heart and then my divinity will unite with them in a special way, although not hypostatic and it will be possible to say that the human has become divine by participation, although not by nature” (CAM 3/25). For Dehon in the Eucharist the apex of spiritual union with Christ becomes reality. Here one becomes one with the Heart of Christ, a sort of eucharistic incarnation. Because the Eucharist is consumed, it can be said that the annihilation of Jesus as victim “is the only destruction [which] renders God a glory that is worthy of him” (CAM 3/129). Dehon calls it “eucharistic annihilation.” (CAM 3/129) It is a sacrifice of expiation, reparation, immolation: “He has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal. 2). Just as Christ is total oblation, the life of sacrifice is the core of the Eucharist, the core of Christian life. (CAM 3/220). Love summarizes all: “In the Sacred Heart of Jesus thanksgiving is an act of love given to God for the love to which he gave testimony to his divine Son and to us by giving him a heart capable of giving his Father infinite glory and assuring humans the participation in divinity through divine adoption which we receive especially by our union with the sacrament of love” (CAM 3/222).

Conclusion

The “new way”, to which these retreats to the Sacred Heart introduce us, presents the endpoint of the devotion to live in pure love. It provides the entry of the meditant into the mystery of disinterested love, that is, the Sacred Heart. For us – the followers of Léon Dehon – living in the 21st century, it raises the question what such a mystical entry means in relation to the other preoccupations in Dehon’s project that we see reflected in his other writings? How to place *Couronnes d’amour* alongside his societal writings or his correspondence, or his memoirs? That question has been left large unanswered in his *Couronnes d’amour*. It awaits the testimony of his followers who have dedicated their lives and their ministry to put Dehon’s legacy into practice. We trust that this seminar on “Dehon in his texts” will create new intersections in the voluminous

writings of Dehon that will allow us to get a better grasp of the figure whom Yves Ledure concluded remains largely unknown[38].

North American Dehonian Theological Commission

[38] "Léon Dehon entre mythe et histoire : L'oubli du sociétal ? " *Dehoniana X,* 2012, p. 92.